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ABSTRACT

This paper explores what a reading teacher might do to guide students to achieve and be successful in reading. The paper first points out that there are selected programs of reading instruction which are individualized for optimal student success, and then discusses some of these programs, such as: individualized reading; the experience chart; programmed reading; packaged materials as individualized reading instruction; and sustained silent reading (SSR) as individualized reading. It also discusses group experiences in successful reading, including: the traditional basal readers; library books used in a seminar method; and the Big Book approach. The paper concludes with a discussion of the great debate in reading--one school of thought stresses holism, while the other advocates phonics instruction. It opines that reading teachers need to study and analyze likenesses and differences between holism versus tightly scripted programs of reading instruction, suggesting that perhaps elements of both may be used in the teaching of reading. (Contains 15 references.) (NKA)

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Success in the Reading Curriculum.

by Marlow Ediger

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SUCCESS IN THE READING CURRICULUM

Success in the reading curriculum in terms of optimal achievement for each student is an ideal. The reading teacher has a difficult task to perform in providing for each student to do as well as possible in a sequential reading program. Students in a class possess individual characteristics which result in the following differences: interests, abilities, aptitudes, achievement, attitudes, skills, goals, and purposes. The teacher has a plethora of problems spelled out for the self in the teaching of reading when providing for these differences in assisting each student to achieve as well as possible. What might a teacher do to guide students to achieve and be successful in reading?

The Student and Success in Reading

There are selected programs of reading instruction which are individualized. Students then individually achieve objectives of reading instruction on a personal basis. The following are examples:

1. individualized reading. Here, a good supply of library books on diverse topics and on different levels of reading achievement need to be in the offing. The learner then may choose, from among alternatives, which library books to read sequentially. The teacher intervenes only if the student cannot settle down to read a library book. He/she might then assist the student to select and read a library book. The reading teacher may help learners with word identification problems when pronouncing unknown words to readers. The student may have a conference with the teacher after the completion of reading the library book.

In the conference setting, the following may be evaluated pertaining to learner achievement and progress in reading:

a) how interested the learner appears to be in reading library books.

b) how well the student comprehended vital facts, concepts, and generalizations.

c) how fluently the student reads aloud a self chosen specific selection in the library book. The kinds of errors made by the student may be recorded by the teacher and remedial help provided.

d) how the learner relates the content in the library book to other curriculum areas.

e) how appropriate the content in the library book was to the student's feeling of success in achievement (Ediger, 2000, Chapter Six).

2. the experience chart. Here, primary grade students need to have personal experiences with objects and items placed on an interest center. These materials need to be observed carefully and discussed in an informal setting among peers. The teacher may then call for ideas to record on the posted butcher paper or with word processor use. Learners may see talk written down by the teacher in neat manuscript letters. The content for the experience chart came directly from the student's own background information pertaining to what was observed at the interest center. Together with the teacher pointing to each word/phrase, students may read aloud the ensuing contents. Rereading might occur as often as desired. Games can be played to promote phonics ideas using experience chart content, such as asking students which word is noticed that starts like "want," or ends like "can." The teacher needs to judge when learners are ready for these kinds of experiences. Each experience chart may be saved and bound for future reading. When students provide ideas for and read from the experience chart, the following may be noticed:

a) how well each learner participated in presenting ideas.

b) how well each student attended to the oral reading of contents from the experience chart.

c) how well students individually read orally using experience chart subject matter.

d) how well students do on phonics games played when using experience chart subject matter.

e) how successful learners are individually when using the experience chart concept in reading instruction.

Experience charts may be developed at all age levels. Thus, when students can do their very own writing, they record personal ideas and read what has been written. When proof reading the contents of a letter written, the writer proofs that which has been recorded. The experience chart concept is inherent in these kinds of activities. Booth individualized reading and the experience chart are very open ended approaches in teaching reading. There are no manuals to follow when using these two approaches in teaching reading (Ediger, 1985, 8-11).

3. programmed reading. Programmed reading may be provided in book or software form. The proper criteria to use is to begin where the individual student is presently in word recognition and comprehension. The reader may then progress as rapidly as possible on each sequential frame of instruction. Thus, the student reads a small bit of information, responds to a multiple choice test

item, and notices if he/she responded correctly. If the response was correct, the learner moves forward to the next sequential learning. If incorrect, he/she notices the correct answer as provided by the programmer and also goes on to the next frame of instruction. Sometimes a programmer uses a branching approach if a reader responded incorrectly to what had been read. The incorrect response then is branched out to a series of responses which the learner must make to multiple choice test items. The branching out leads a student to be able to read what was missed on the initial response. The student then goes on to the next sequential frame in programmed reading. Read a small amount, respond to a multiple choice comprehension test item, notice the correct answer as given by the programmer, and then progress to the next sequential learnings in reading. Programmed reading is highly structured by the programmer who wrote the program. There is no input from the teacher or student in developing programmed materials in reading instruction.

In programmed reading, the learner may move forward as rapidly as he/she can progress on an individual basis. Student achievement in programmed reading may be assessed by

a) noticing how well the learner remains on task.

b) noticing how sequentially the learner is achieving in programmed reading.

c) noticing if the student reads library books independently as a result of programmed learning success.

d) noticing if the learner is able to transfer learnings from programmed reading to the identification of unknown words in a literary selection.

e) noticing how well the student comprehends subject matter in programmed and in other writings in general (Ediger, 1984-1985), 16-18).

4. packaged materials as individualized reading instruction. The author here will use the SRA Reading Laboratory published by Science Research Associates as a discussion model. The student will be guided by the teacher as to where to start in a specific package for a beginning program of reading instruction or for any grade level. Once the starting point has been decided upon, the student selects the first card which contains an illustration as well as related print discourse. The student reads the print or story and answers questions, contained on the card, pertaining to what had been read. To check answers, the student needs to obtain the scoring card from the teacher's desk. The learner may then check his/her answers with those on the scoring card. Once the checking has been done and a satisfactory level of achievement has been made, the learner progresses to the next sequential card. He/she reads the contents

and answers the related questions on the card. After the activity card has been completed, the learner obtains the answer card from the teacher to personally check comprehension and word recognition results. With satisfactory work, the student is ready to read the next sequential card as it is arranged in the packaged material or box, the latter being true of SRA. SRA and programmed reading have the following similarities in design of instruction:

a). both have the sequence arranged by the writer(s) of the reading materials.

b). both have predetermined objectives for students to achieve. Thus, the writers of each plan of instruction have specific goals in mind as to what students are to learn. The answers students receive for responses made indicate the goals which the writers had in mind for learner achievement.

c). both have exact answers to be given by students in response to either a programmed item or questions on a reading/answer card.

d). both use a stimulus-- response plan of reading instruction, SR Theory, in that there is content to read (the stimulus) and answers to be given (the response) by the learner.

e). both are strong in specifically determining what students are to achieve in reading (See Ediger, 1975, 237-238).

Programed reading, as compared to packaged materials of instruction, is

a). highly controlled in its writing whereby the answer/response very precisely matches with the question. Thus, there is only one correct answer/response.

b). pilot tested thoroughly, if well developed, before use by students in that a 95% success rate is to be expected when students make responses to each programmed item . Commercial companies that sell programmed materials have the needed finances to run an adequate number of pilot studies in their reading materials.

c). very carefully sequenced in that students generally experience success when responding to a programmed item.

d). strict in its aligning the stimulus and the response. The response then matches with the stimulus, or, in saying it in another way, the learning activity matches directly with the objective.

e). very routine in its orientation with read, respond, and check. The three underlined concepts are repeated again and again with little/no variation (Ediger, 2000, Chapter Ten).

Packaged materials of reading instruction are also written and developed

by a commercial company. Their materials of instruction, however, are more open-ended as compared to programmed reading. Packaged materials, as compared to programmed reading,

a). emphasize guided reading instruction whereby the questions on a reading card indicate that which is to be learned. The answers may stress more than one correct response,

b). also emphasize pilot testing, but largely to take out the kinks out of vague language used in reading and testing.

c). the order of cards to be read by students have been determined by writers of the packaged materials whereby skills developed in one card are used to assist in reading achievement on the next sequential card.

d). stresses alignment of learning activities with the objectives as determined by the writer, but there is not the tightly knit stimulus -- response (S>R) psychology of leaning.

e). indicates learner success quite quickly when the answer card is used for scoring, immediately after the student has responded to the questions thereon. However, with programmed learning, the student receives feedback on each response made, immediately after responding to a single stimulus (Ediger, 1999, 330-332).

5. sustained silent reading (SSR) as individualized reading. SSR is implemented when everyone in the school setting reads at a given time. this includes students, teachers, the principal, cafeteria workers, custodians, and support personnel. Each person reading then serves as a model for the individual student to emulate. Each person selects his/her own reading materials to use during SSR. There are no evaluations made on comprehension of subject matter read, but each is to read something of value. The setting for reading is indeed informal and there is no pressure on the learner except to choose something worthwhile to read. If it is not possible for all in the school setting to read at a given time, perhaps, the students and the classroom teacher may read silently to indicate the importance of reading. SSR is indeed a very open ended approach in having students enjoy and read library books (Ediger, 1989, 11-15).

Group Experiences in Successful Reading

Basal readers have been used for over 150 years in helping students learn to read. The Mc Guffey Readers introduced in 1836 is an example of a basal reader which was used to teach reading to all learners on different grade levels. Basal readers presently have an accompanying manual which teachers may use to teach students in reading. The manual suggests objectives, learning

opportunities, and evaluation procedures for teachers to implement. The stories in the basal are written for students and provide a sequence of literature to follow in teaching reading. The teacher needs to use the accompanying manual, along with his/her own teaching suggestions, to provide for individual differences among students in the classroom. Teachers here need to engage students in reading by making learnings interesting, meaningful, and purposeful. The teaching suggestions involve comprehension questions on different levels of cognition a well as word recognition skills to be taught. The success of basal reader use depends much upon the classroom teacher and his/her abilities to implement quality instruction. But, the quality of students involved also makes for success or a lack thereof when emphasizing basal reader use in teaching and learning situations. The basal reader then is a tool to use in instructing a classroom of students to make continual progress in reading. The basal reader is neither good, nor bad, but depends upon how it is used by the reading teacher. The manual and the basal reader should be used by the teacher to

1. instruct learners to identify new words to be met up with in print, prior to oral or silent reading.
2. assist learners to attach meaning to these new words.
3. help learners with phonetic and syllabic elements within the new words in order to become independent in word identification.
4. build background information within students so that the ensuing reading activity will be more meaningful as well as familiar.
5. guide learners to establish reasons or purposes for reading silently/orally.
6. discuss with students the established purposes/reasons (questions to be answered) for reading.
7. challenge students to branch out from basal reader content discussed by introducing library books to read written on the same/similar topic by the same author as was contained in the story discussed in the basal reader.
8. provide followup experiences for students directly related to the story discussed by engaging students in an art, construction, dramatization, mural, or a diorama project.
9. diagnose and remediate student problems in reading fluently and meaningfully.
10. stimulate learners to engage in reflective thinking (Ediger, 1998, 183-191).

In addition to basal readers used in group endeavors in teaching reading, library books may be used in a seminar method. A seminar method approaches

subject matter content read in depth. All in the seminar should have had access to reading the same literary selection. Participants, as many as six to eight in number, in the seminar may be guided by the teacher or a responsible peer. There should be ample opportunities for each to participate as adequately as possible in depth instruction in the seminar method than when a class of twenty or more are considering the contents of a basal reader. Smaller groups are necessary so that increased frequency of responses are possible by those involved in a seminar discussion. A major purpose of the seminar is for students to enjoy subject matter read as well as be probers of content read in depth. Actually, enjoyment and probing should be goals of instruction in any reading program. These two goals, however, should be emphasized thoroughly within the seminar framework of

a) critical thinking such as separating facts from opinions, fantasy from reality, and the salient from the non salient ideas.

b) creative thinking as used in brain storming which might well contain unique, novel content.

c) problem solving involving selecting a clearly defined problem, gathering information from a variety of reference sources, developing an hypothesis , and testing the hypothesis (Ediger, 1993, 16).

A third group learning experience in reading might well involve the Big Book procedure. The Big Book has a small amount of print on each page together with a large accompanying illustration for young readers. Each student should be able to see clearly the illustrations and print from where they are located. The teacher here assists students to build background information by having them study the illustrations on the page(s) to be read. Next, the teacher reads aloud as the students follow along in the Big Book, located in front of the small group being taught. In the second read loud, students join the teacher, as the latter again points to the words and phrases in the sequential reading. Rereading may be done as often as necessary. The Big Book approach in reading stresses the following:

1. building a basic sight vocabulary by having students read and reread a short selection.

2. using whole language procedures of instruction in that students read the entire selection, not segmenting the subject matter with word recognition techniques taught in between.

3. emphasizing a non threatening environment due to students reading together and not pinpointing a learner who may need more oral rereading before being able to remember selected sight words (See Ediger, 1994, 31-32).

The Big Book approach could incorporate the following:

1. phonics as needed by by using a game approach. Here, the teacher may ask students at the end of a reading lesson such questions as

a) which word begins like "bear" and is on the page we are looking on?"

b) can you think of other words which begin with the same sound as "bear?"

c) which word ends like "lion" and is on this same page?

d) which word on this page rhymes with "play"?

e) can you think of other words which rhyme with "play"?

Big Book approaches may be used on several grade levels if the contents are large enough for all to see and read from. This procedure may be excellent for older students than young primary grade students. Older students who need assistance in developing a basic sight vocabulary may be able to do so by using the Big Book approach. There would be no embarrassment of learners here in that the group reads together and no student would be embarrassed reading aloud in a group setting. The point is that students need to learn to read and read better. There is that push now, in all states, to have all third graders, for example, read on grade level. The "read on grade level" philosophy may be carried over to all grades, if it is feasible or not. There are selected problems with the push on students being able to read on grade level, including the following:

1. what is the yardstick to be used in determining if a students is reading on grade level? The author is assuming that a basal reader may be used to ascertain if a student is/is not reading on grade level. Basal readers are written for specific grade levels. And yet, a specific basal reader may be more complex for that grade level as compared to other basal readers on the commercial market.

2. students differ from each other in a plethora of ways such as interests, purposes in life, motivation, abilities, and intelligence. For example, Gardner (1993) lists the following intelligences which may be possessed by individual students: verbal, visual/artistic, logical/mathematical, musical/rhythmical, intrapersonal, interpersonal, bodily/kinesthetic, and scientific. Not all, for example, will excel in verbal intelligence which stresses reading and writing as key components. Thus, students may reveal what they have learned individually in many ways, such as in reading comprehension. A learner may then indicate that which has been learned through developing drawings, developing a mural or diorama, and/or dramatizing content read. All students, however, should learn to

read as well as individual differences permit.

3. what happens to a student who does not read on grade level? Summer school, and before/after school tutoring have been used to "make up" where a student has not achieved as well as desired by a school system or state. There, no doubt, will still be students who will not reach the desired standard of reading on grade level. Not receiving a high school diploma has been used to "motivate" students to pass the state exit examination.

4. state mandated tests have become important devices to sort students of those who pass versus those who fail the exit examination. Then too, state mandated tests have been used as gate keepers in determining which students are to be promoted from one grade level to the next (Ediger, 2000, 59-68).

The Great Debate in Reading

In many ways, the great debate hinges around two schools of thought in reading instruction. One school of thought stresses holism whereby the emphasis is upon the following:

1. students reading the entire selection for meaning with little stress placed upon analyzing the kinds of errors made in word recognition. Meaning theory in comprehension is then in evidence. If attention is placed upon word recognition techniques, it is entirely at the beginning before the selection is read when introducing the new words to students or at the end after the selection has been read.

2. students discussing the content read emphasizing enjoyment and comprehension of subject matter at different levels of cognition.

3. methods of teaching reading being very open ended. Creativity on the part of teachers and students in the reading curriculum is to be encouraged (See Ediger, 1996, 25-30).

Advocates of phonics instruction, among other word recognition techniques, believe strongly in analyzing new words and those not mastered by students in terms of sound/symbol relationships (See Wright, 2001, 30-33). How tightly then should the reading curriculum be sequenced for learners in reading? How tightly should the reading teacher stick to the manual in teaching and learning situations? The following then are advocated by selected educators in assisting students to do well in reading:

1. tightly scripted programs in which all designated teachers are on the same page at the same time in teaching reading.

2. precise directions given to teachers in the manual as to what to say to

students and in what order.

3. detailed prescriptions for teachers provided as to what to think and to write on the chalkboard when teaching reading.

4. teacher proof materials being in the offing when the manual accompanying the reading series sequences the order of what to teach and the manner of doing so.

5. the degree of rigidity in teachers following the manual of a specific approach may vary slightly when comparing these highly sequenced reading materials.

Dudley- Marling and Murphy (2001) list three series of reading programs which are highly sequenced and tightly knit:

1. Success for All (SFA).
2. Direct Instruction, formerly Distar.
3. the Open Court readers.

Reading teachers need to study and analyze likenesses and differences between holism versus tightly scripted programs of reading instruction. Perhaps, elements of both may be used in the teaching of reading. Learning styles theory of instruction may also be used in decision making. Thus, Searson nd Dunn (2001) differentiate the learning styles of individuals into those students who learn in a step by step manner as compared to those desiring to learn in a global manner of holism whereby these students wish to understand content before looking at specifics such as factual knowledge.

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